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MOUNTAIN
AGAINST MOUNTAIN

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Arthur Davison Ficke

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AGAINST MOUNTAIN

By
Arthur Davison
Ficke

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FIRST EDITION

TO WITTER BYNNER

*What can the world of wise-men guess
Of friends who talk of loveliness—
Friends who will battle a night-long
Over a doctrine or a song?—
Friends who will talk a whole night through
Of things that no man ever knew—
Friends who forgot an age ago
All that wise-men can ever know.*

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PARIS 1917



PARIS 1917

I

AS our long grey ship swept out of the harbour
The regimental band of the One Hundred Twenty-eighth
Infantry,
Sixty strong,
Sent the roar and flare and flash of leaping music
Out over the grey waves heavy and terrible
Rolling under dim skies.
And in one sudden moment I came to love
The flaunt of the bands and banners
And flags and marching men and rattling caissons;
And I was grateful to God that even these things
He had made, to lend their roar and flash and flare,
Their pageant of gay strong music, their splendid terror,
To the grey waves of living.

2

Grey and tremendous seas by day
And long grey guns confronting
Sea and sky—
By night the muffled stifling darkness of a ship
As desolate as though ten fathoms deep
Drowned underseas a thousand years ago.

Through the black passage-ways
The indistinguishable figures steal
Of friend or stranger; all are strangers now.
From a cabin comes broken singing; then it ceases.
Four sentries pace uneasily down the passage-ways.

Greyness, darkness, silence—
No light and no living voice.

These are the wars, my friends;
A curious business. . . .

3

"To horse! To horse!" sing the bugles
Down all the corridors
Pealing the old cavalry-call.
And high overhead
Blares the ship's siren—
"Abandon ship!"

Suddenly awakes
The thunder and rush of five thousand men
Pouring in endless hurrying columns
Up from the ship's depths, running, stumbling,
Fastening life-belts as they stumble and run.
The empty decks surge now with jostling forms;
All is confusion and turmoil—then
Almost in a moment the chaos falls into place,
Rank after ordered rank, each man at his station

Rigidly fore-appointed, each officer poised
Surveying the ranks with watchful eyes, his pistol
Swinging heavily at his thigh. Then silence. . . .

“Break ranks. Back to quarters” comes the order. . . .

When will come the hour when the rehearsal
Will turn to the strange drama of a thousand
Passions and crises here amid grey seas?
Will there be order, or a mob of madmen
Whom we must drive with the crash of pistol bullets
Back to their places as boat after boat
Shatters against the side?

4

“Two spades” I bid; and the Colonel, my partner,
Grinned at me and said “Four no-trump.”

Then suddenly the siren screeched nine times,
The gongs in the troop-holds sounded the general alarm,
And as we dropped our cards and stepped out onto the deck
The storm broke.—

From the high black prow of the transport beside us
Spurred flash after flash; and the sharp shock of each report
Was echoed by gun-thunder from our own bow, shaking
the ship;
And farther to the right the grey armoured cruiser

Swung into action, firing six guns at a broadside,
Barking crashes, spurts that tore the air
With the shock of terrific force unleashed, as the white
 plumes
Of smitten water rose, close to a small black column
Steadily growing shorter as down it sank
Under the grey lashed water. . . .

And we
Speeding away toward the clear horizon
Knew not then, and never shall know for certain,
If we had left behind us, down in the sea-deeps,
Twenty chuckling Germans or twenty steel-tombed dead-
 men. . . .
A curious business, war. . . .

5

To you, sir,
I dedicate these sketches,
Though you will never read them,
And would laugh if you did.

You I shall remember
When the wars are over.
The fine tolerant forehead,
The snapping and soul-searching eyes,
The smile that can at times light and transfigure

A darkly twisted face,
The perfect justice of the firm lean hands, the unswerving
endurance—
For these things, sir, we love you
And will if necessary go through hell with you
And come out with you on the other side.

. . . A skull shaped for terrible labour—
Strong pliant large-boned hands—
White hair and blazing black eyes—
Eyes that are shell-fire. . . .

At times you are to me
As tender as my own father,
As gay as my beloved,
As bitter as God.
And when the wars are over, sir,
I shall sometimes come from afar
And sit at your hearth to recover
The best of the old days.

6

Like a lover journeying through sunny fields
To meet his mistress,
So was my passage
Across late summer valleys of Brittany
To you, O Paris!

O Paris!—I, after so long returning,
A changed lover to a changed beloved!
Now your lavish beauty has grown meagre,
And there are carven hollows along your cheeks
That stir me with a beauty more terrible than beauty.
And your eyes are fathomless with the shadows
Of one who walks in the shadows every evening
With Death as a new lover whispering beside you.

And yet, I think, through the late years
His voice has lost for you
Its heart-breaking terror.
His words fall with expected monotony
And they are now meaningless to your ears.
And perhaps as you move through the dusk
With Death as a lover beside you,
All that you are aware of
Is the exquisite stately grace
Of two such lovers as you and He.

7

This morning they sent you, my friend of a week,
To the southern line-end
Commanding a machine-gun company.
It was good-bye;
We both knew it.
There was nothing very much to say about it
Except "Good-luck, Captain!"
"Good-luck, Captain!"

And you, my other new friend,
Dear Major of Cavalry, brown as an oak—
Why did they order you northward
To await the moment
When the long-checked front of the cavalry-wave
Like a torrent
Shall beat itself to fragments
In a wild chaos of triumphant ruin?

Why did they do these things?—
And leave me here
With orders—— “Stationed in Paris.”

With our neatly type-written orders
Safe in our dispatch-cases
We stopped at the same old café
And had the casual *aperitif* of the morning.
Then one of you went north,
And the other of you went south,
And I went to look at
The gargoyles of Notre Dame.

8

That morning
It was a maniac or a great musician
Who sat at the organ-keys of Notre Dame.
Lights flamed on the High Altar,
And the official priests of a very old god
Paraded before it.

But it was not they who shook
The vaults and arches of this dim edifice
With terror and wonder and exaltation—
Not they who filled these gloomy spaces,
These caverned darknesses defying sunlight,
With call and echo and answer and something more—
Not they who woke to spectral life again
An awe once known to tragic souls who reared
These caves of darkness in the sunlight. . . .

Unending is this tyranny of the darkness;
Over the soul it broods, and will not hence.
Meadow and portico in vain abjure it;
Here it returns, the terror, the inescapable
Mood of the Gothic builder; and you, musician,
Become its instrument, and shake with splendour
Its gloomy curtain, and light windy torches
As round the catafalque of a murdered king.

9

In the Gardens of the Luxembourg to-day
Autumn leaves along the gravel paths
Are aimlessly blown.
Here amid the statues and fountains,
On the site of an old and fabulous revelry,
Leaves drift, as aimlessly now as in great ports,
Through crowded cities, toward shaken fields,

Men, alive, in tempestuous driven herds
Move blindly—
Move toward the cold eventual calm
Of deliverance.

There are seasons of calm,
But this, the autumn, is a season of tempest. . . .
O tempest that has no calm!
Tempest that in these statues, these gardens,
These marching grey men, lives with appalling life
Forever, forever, forever. . . .

10

Here in the great war-offices
Where the generals sit dictating words
That will soon mean the life or death of thousands—
Here where the captains move to and fro
Planning, ordering, executing, and each littered desk
Is the theatre where some brain makes and enacts his drama
With intensely focused eyes and quiet hands—
Here, the war and its blood and horror and ultimate meaning
Seem wholly remote, seem things of no existence.
Italy menaced, Venice in deadly peril,
Russia tottering on the brink of chaos,
America stirring with crazy passion to save the world,
Are all like dreams, whispering vaguely afar.
Day by day, here at the war's heart, here

Where the lines converge from the trenches, the speeding
ships,
The roaring arsenals—here at the hurricane's heart
Is quiet and order.

Swiftly the days and nights
Flash by as each man, tense at his little desk,
Forgets the war and the movements of history,
And labours with single thought at his separate task,
Drunk in a trance of labour, drugged with the sweet
Of strenuous toil. All he shall ever know
Of the War will be when some day he sits by the fire,
An old man, dreaming of fabulous Paris days,
And reads what others shall write in solemn books
Of the march of history.

II

In a daze of confused weariness
I lean back from my desk
And close my tired eyes.
And I seem to see a picture of a room
Where the Judge Advocate of the General Court-martial
Is also leaning back in his chair
In a daze of confused weariness.
Outside the windows of his room
The early Paris dusk
Has deepened to misty blackness; the lights are vague
And pale down the long street; the white papers
Glare on the desk before him under the drop-light.

To-morrow the Judge Advocate
Will convict
Under the Ninety-fifth Article of War
A splendid young officer, and have him sentenced
To dishonourable dismissal from the Army of the United
States;
And the disgraced young man
Will assuredly kill himself.
As now the Judge Advocate sits
In tired meditation
His thoughts are less obscure to me than are my own;
His unreality and mine grow one;
He merges with my dream and I with his;
As one spectator we look out upon
This war, these days of ceaseless work, these nights
Of anxious sleep. Ah, now he seems to sleep,
His eyes close, his thoughts are far away—
A vague uncertainty as to who he is
And who I am comes over my obscure brain.
Then as an orderly enters the room and salutes
I open my eyes; the picture rights itself;
And as I return the salute and take the message
I dizzily know that I am the Judge Advocate
And that I shall have to kill a man to-morrow.

12

That night, Thanksgiving night, we all were tired;
And the much-talked-of turkey when it came

Was only cold meats at the funeral feast.
We knew the war was endless, and the end
Of our lives' continuity—as we knew
That, toward the east, dark clouds were lifting up
Appalling crests where Russia crumbled down
And Italy gave way. "Perhaps," we said
That night at the grave table, "there is lost
The hope that led us; for, surely, to-night
The cause is weaker than one year ago
It stood; our enemy has for thirty years
Rehearsed this play:—how shall we now start up
Full-armed, who sowed no Dragon's Teeth—how learn
In one short lifetime all the things that sweep
Like instincts down the German blood? Our follies,
Boasts, dim confusions, silly faiths and pride
Now shall eat dust. Perhaps the incredible end
Awaits us—beaten!"

And we went to bed,
Blind and unhappy—anything but soldiers.

13

I stalk at night through the streets of Paris,
Dressed in leather puttees,
An officer's cap,
An olive-drab swinging trench-coat—
And by God, it is not I who walks these streets;
I am someone else; someone long-dead and forgotten.

[12]

. . . Damp leaves fall

Where the gravel paths are shining; the pavements are mir-
rors

Streaked with sudden swathes of light, under skies
As grey and lightless as forest-smoke. At dawn
The streets and vistas and arches slowly unfold
Out of clinging vapours of darkness; and like a city
Under the sea, are cloudy and fabulous
As an Atlantis.

And the middle-day is grey
With light that comes from nowhere, that is thick ether
Spread through space in even texture.

Grey

Rise the dark towers of Notre Dame; grey
The last few southward-flying swallows
Sweep past.

And evening comes, as with wide wings
Of greyness folding over the city. There burns
No sunset, not one gleam of golden light
To break the cold west. Night is only greyness
Grown old. Night:—then the perfect silence of greyness—
Sleep.

One thing throughout all of these Paris days
Is always near, whether by day or night:
It is the shadow of impending Death.

From far horizons He is sweeping hither;
And young men, coming from my own country,
Wear His shade cloak-like round them, though they know
not.

I see them walk the crowded boulevards, laughing;
I see them mad in the chase of youth and beauty—
And I see Him who follows after them.

This city, like a woman whose early beauty
Has been consumed by her own passion, now
Preserves so little of that which Villon saw
Or Abelard. Rome keeps its arches; Chartres
Is mediæval still by the great presence
Of one immortal edifice. But here
The later days have blotted the past away
Wholly; it is Napoleon who here lives;
And the swift grandeur of his sweeping flight
In these long vistas is as visible
As the cut stones. There are no traces now
Of saints or sages—only the conqueror,
And the sound of boastful trumpets, of horses, of swords!

Beautiful city! where the heart of man
 Has for two centuries' space renounced the dark
 Terrible struggle that the Gothic builders
 Almost made triumph! Beautiful city! wise
 With the day's wisdom, that against the stars
 Raises no futile spires! All men have loved you
 For your calm acquiescence, your exquisite strength
 As you accept the mortal lot, and garland
 Man's doom with ease and leisure and happiness
 And grace that is, like that of the Greeks of old,
 A certain victory over fate.

No war
 Has power to change you. You are the happy wanton
 Still, and will always be . . .

Beautiful city!

From the Gardens of the Tuileries
 To the far majesty of the Arc de Triomphe
 Is but one sweep for the Napoleonic eagle's wings.
 I, a humble man,
 Looking out from among the absurd statues
 Of a pleasure-palace now as mythical
 As the isle toward which embarked
 The gallants and the ladies of Watteau—

Looking through autumn mists toward an arch whose
triumph
Is even now as vain as Alexander's—
I am made one with these great open spaces;
The madness of their logic overcomes me;
I am lifted up,
I hear the cry of eagles
Shrieking "Glory! Glory! Glory!" in the voice of Napoleon;
I am born on terrible wings. . . .

It is because of these influences, doubtless,
That the French nation
Will always be so ridiculous
In the sight of heartless foreigners.
It is because of these great vistas
That the taxi-drivers scowl like Hannibal,
And that the moustaches of the policemen
Drip so menacingly in the rain.

19

There is sun to-day
And there are leaping silver fountains
Here amid the smooth pale statues
Of the Tuileries Gardens.
Last night
As here in thick, flame-broken darkness I stood,
Over these Gardens swept the turmoil
Of battling fliers, the continuous roar

Of shrapnel and of falling bombs.
To-morrow, sandbags will be installed
Around all these absurd statues.
But the sun may shine;
And surely there will still be children and lovers
In these Gardens.

20

These days disintegrate our heroes!—
The young heroes who left their homes and came
Far overseas, to save an old, shrewd world
For liberty!

Now in cold desolate camps
Or dirty billets they are waiting—
Waiting, and still no orders come.
The cold creeps into their bones; at last they know
That Cæsar, take from him his camp-fire,
Had not been Cæsar. . . .

21

To-day the first of our unnumbered dead
Laid down their lives in the torn fields of France;
And where they fell, men in the future days
Will raise a shaft of granite.

Soon there will be
Such rivers poured forth of our nation's blood
That none will mark how this or that one fell,

And no shaft will be placed to mark the spot
Where a man's soul and body met the end
And gave up life and living hope to serve
A truth, a faith, a dream we see not clearly.

There are dim mists over the world to-night.
Nothing is certain; nothing is clear; the stars
Flicker in vagueness. In the dark streets
Among the passing strangers, the Enigma
Leers and laughs and wrings its bony hands.

22

Your hair is of pale gold,
My friend the Captain,
And there are silver gleams
Across it where light strikes the crests of curls.

Out of your eyes there glow
Those curious signalling
Which, I have come to think,
Mark an indwelling soul,
Not a mere ikon.

You are a youth whom girls
In the wild flush of April
Might, at a meeting in the flowered fields,
Love, and forever follow, and bear children,
And go down with you happy to old-age,
Part of the generations.

Or you might lead the vanguard
And die in the front rank of conquering thought
As it assaults the wall
Of cruelty and darkness.

You are a soul—beautiful,
Holy, and limitless.
When the morning stars sang together
I think that you were there.

I do not tell you these things,
My friend the Captain.
I say only the casual "Good-night!"
And as you fade
Into the darkness of the surrounding dusk
I picture the twisted shoulders, the mud-ground face
Of you, bright soul, when you shall have accomplished
The doom of those small silver wings
Embroidered on your breast.

23

That doom was a dream of yesterday,
My friend the Captain.
For to-day they tell me
That you were killed last night by a motor-truck
Here in the streets of Paris.

Girl with the dark soft eyes—
 Eyes that have looked on too much—
 I see you in your remote corner
 As I eat my dinner alone.
 And I am not so unaware of your questing glance
 As I pretend to be.

I am too old to believe
 That all of your loveliness is real.
 I am too young to believe
 That all of it is mere deception.
 You look out upon me from the shadowy border
 Of the land between the dream-land and the waking-land.
 Half of you is a nymph I knew once in Arcady;
 Half of you is a lie I believed once in Paradise.
 You are of the earth earthy and of the sunrise heavenly.
 You are half-divine and half-mortal, like the rest.

In your eyes I see a longing wonder.
 You are seeker, not the sought-one solely.
 You are wanderer on dim waters, also.

What shall save us? What shall be our final shore of
 refuge?—
 We who are adrift—we who seek forever
 After happiness that always flies
 With a speed beyond our power to follow? . . .
 Ah, you would not understand such broodings
 From an alien, lost in a lost world!

You are youth and beauty in her heyday. . . .
What matters all the rest?

25

Paris is still the old and sacred wanton.
Though in a thousand fields not far from here
The earth is rich
With the ruin of beautiful men,
Still on each corner wait the smiling girls,
The young clear luminous lamps of the twilight,
With the old lure for the living.

And so be it!

Since in the heart, doomed to its sorry end,
Was planted a love of a transient passionate beauty—
Was planted a madness of moments instead of a wisdom
That might outlast the hours—so be it! and let
The young men, soon to die, for the brief time
That still remains till some drunken general
Misreads his map and orders them to their doom,
Let them be happy as young men should be happy. . . .
Iseult and Guinevere, were they alive,
Might stand under yonder street-light. . . .

26

"I have just sent," she said,
"Forty photographs of me to my boys.
Some of my boys are on the Italian Front,
Some are in Lorraine, some in Argonne.

All of their first names I remember—
But their last names, some of them perhaps I forget.
And so the photographs will never reach them;
And then I shall be sorry,
For they are all nice boys.
I have been happy for a little while with each of them,
At different times in all the three years
Since the war began.
Some of them have terrible lives,
Always at the Front,
With only two weeks twice a year
Of *permission* here in Paris.
Sometimes when one of them says—‘Come back with me;
I will find you a little cottage, not so far behind the lines,
And then we can be together sometimes’—
Then I think for a moment that I will go;
But then I know how tired I would get there,
And after that I would not like him any more.
Here in Paris, I am happy,
Seeing them all once in a while.
Every week, every month, one of my boys comes—
Sometimes two at once—and then the trouble I have!
But seriously, the war it is terrible.
—Oh, excuse me, there is one of my boys. . . .
Oh mon Capitaine! . . . Oh, Pierre, mon petit loup!”

I do not find what I am seeking
Either in the eyes of tailored men

Who touch their silky beards
Before the mirrors of cafés,
Or in the rich slim figures of young widows
Becomingly sweeping by
In simple Paquin mourning,
Or in the imposing generals and their rows of stars,
Or in the drunken dirty medal-bespattered soldiers
Home on *permission*.

I find it only—that which I am seeking—
The strong sweet soul of France, lovely, undying—
Only in the eyes of little girls who pass
Hurriedly through these streets to work or play:
Small creatures whom the terrors of life afright not—
Brave little wanderers on the edge of abysses—
Lovers and laughers and toilers and moths of the candle,
Dancing or dying with a ribbon in their hair.

28

Black days! When out of Tours the orders come . . .
And we obey them, and our spirits clutch
At far hopes. We obey, though we are dumb,
The orders that mean nothing, or not much.

And in the street, flame-footed rumour runs;
And to the north all day and night we hear
When the wind shifts, incredible and clear,
The steady thunder of the German guns.

In spite of your ugly voluminous skirt of black
 And your crabbed old face where three teeth showed as a
 menace,
 I think that you loved me
 As, night after night,
 In that little shabby café
 You brought me my dinner.

And I think that if I had come
 Looking hungry and poor,
 And had ordered bread and cheese only,
 You would have brought me a huge dinner and a bottle of
 wine,
 And would have paid for it yourself.

For sometimes as I caught your old eyes
 Looking stealthily at me in a mirror
 I had a fancy—it may be only a fancy—
 That somewhere on the borders of France, in the cold
 autumn mire,
 There is lying the wreck of a young man
 Who was once tall and blue-eyed and curly-haired
 Like me.

Eight times a day
 In the Gare St. Lazare
 Tired nurses wait
 Till they hear afar

The puffing and booming
Of a distant train.
Then they dab the rouge on,
Lovely girls again—

And, smiling, care for
Boys now safe from harms—
Some of whom die
Quietly in their arms.

31

Dirty little six-year-old ragamuffin
With red hair
And frightened eyes—
When in the café to-night I bought your paper
And gave you a franc for it instead of a sou,
I did not mean to make you burst into tears—
Nor did I mean to do so myself
A moment later, outside, in the gathering dusk.

32

"*Allo!* . . .
Allo! . . .
Yes, *Allo!*
(Sergeant, God damn it, hold that connection!)

"Yes, *allo!*
Oh, yes—yes—
Oh, yes, sir; I can hear you, General.

Yes, sir; yes, I understand that you are at Brest. . . .

Yes, sir . . .

Oh! . . .

Yes, I said 'Oh'

Well, sir, I'm afraid I can't do that

I said, 'I'm afraid I can't do that!' . . .

'Cannot do that'

No, sir. . . .

No, sir. . . .

But, General, you will have no use for horses here in
Paris. . . .

But you see, General, we need every cubic foot of box-car
space

To send up the new seventy-five shells to the front.

The artillery is desperate for them.

I can't possibly let you have a car for your saddle-horses. . . .

"I beg pardon? . . . What? . . .

Well, God damn it, General, I can curse as well as you can.
What you thought you were doing, bringing three saddle-
horses over

I can't imagine; God damn it.

And by what dirty work you got ocean-transportation for
them

I can't even guess; God damn it.

But I can assure you that those three horses

Will be sold to the butcher in Brest

Before I

Send you any box-car for them; God damn it. . . .

[26]

"That's all right: go ahead and prefer charges against
me,
You big boob.
And after the war is over,
Stop in and see me sometime,
And I'll give you a job as office-boy, maybe. . . .

"(Sergeant, for the next ten minutes, please,
Don't answer any calls from Brest.)"

33

Never shall I forget the day
When your promotion came.
It had been ten years overdue;
And we, your officers, clustered around you—
Eager that our eagerness should hide
How much we thought you were undervalued
By the mere "eagles" of a colonel.

You were kind and generous and impassive
As always.
You thanked us as if you did not know
We knew the insult hid
In this inadequate preferment—
An insult straight from the Commanding General—
We knew the reason, and we felt very bitter:
We knew the whole long shameful story.

I lingered last, by some small accident.
And then you muttered—"Wait! . . ."
Slowly unfastening the silver maple-leaves of a lieutenant-colonel
From your two shoulders,
You put them into my hand, and said—
"Captain, these are for you;
In the army we think there is good luck
In handing on one's old insignia.
My colonel gave these to me twenty years ago
The day he got his colonel's eagles.
They were silver then, as they are now;
I was a captain then, so I kept them
Until my majority came, and I had them plated
To gold for a major's leaves, and wore them.
And after ten years
I had to replate them to silver, when I got my lieutenant-colonelcy.
Now they're no use to me—nor to you, who wear *captain's*
bars! . . .
Well, I will tell you a secret: perhaps day after to-morrow
Other promotions come out! . . . It's true! Take my word!
. . . Have these plated
To gold; and wear them, *Major!* as he and I've tried to
wear them.
And may they turn to silver for you, before all this is over!"

Your tired eyes were laughing into mine,
And I was clumsy as a fool, and dumb.

For I had never dreamed of being promoted,
And you were used to getting no reward.

34

"May I see you a moment in private, Major?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

"I'm sick; may I go to the hospital, Major?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

"It's,—Major, I've got it again," he said.

"Yes?" I said.

"You know, Major, don't you—I told you—I'm married?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

"You won't prefer charges, Major? . . . Am I right?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

"And hell! I'm engaged to a French girl, Major!" he said.

"Yes?" I said.

"It's a hell of a war, isn't it, Major?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

[29]

"Allo, allo!

Allo—yes, this is the Line of Communications Headquarters,

Major Bernays speaking. . . .

No, he has gone to Chaumont; I am in charge in his place. . . .

Oh, yes, General. . . .

Yes, sir. . . .

I sent you a long report on that by courier;

It will reach you to-night. . . .

"What did you say?

About the rifle replacements? I've never heard of that matter before. . . .

I don't know, sir. . . .

No, sir. Never heard of the matter. . . .

No, sir, never. Have you asked Colonel Chase in your office? . . .

How about Captain Willis? . . .

Surely Ordnance Sergeant Mulligan would know? . . .

Then I guess nobody knows, sir. . . ."

There are some wastes of darkness in this Paris—
Spots where, by day or night, in street or room,
The horror of this war and of all life
Suddenly folds the passer in its shadow
And chills his blood.

[30]

There are despondent hours
That like unnatural bats across the sunlight
Flicker and swoop. And in the crowded street,
Or in tense offices, or here before
The Arch of Austerlitz where now I stand,
There comes the spectre, again whispering coldly:
"This is your life, that in futility
Now slips away; this is the plot devised
For you, each one of you—snaring your strength,
Draining your blood and wearing out your souls
In meaningless struggle with the gods of chaos!"

37

Sun shone in through the high windows
Of the Inter-allied Officers' Club:
The linen on the luncheon-tables was spotless, the radishes
were freshly red,
The wine was coloured like sunlight.

At the table next to mine sat two stubby British generals.
They ate in wholesome silence
As men who respected good food.

After a long time, one general said to his colleague—
"I hear the Italians have given way on the Piave."

The other general replied decisively—"The Italians
Always have been dirty dogs,
Are at present dirty dogs,
And will always be dirty dogs."

Thereupon both the generals
Dismissed conversation as superfluous
And returned to their food.

38

Now comes the moment of ending; the swift hours
Of this strange Paris dream now darken; to-night
I go toward regions of confusion and flame
And mire and dead men.

When it all is done
And France is once more happy, and Paris turns
Into the old inconsequential Paris,
Perhaps again, I, a grey-headed traveller,
Shall journey here, and see once more the spot
Where, at the turning between youth and age,
Amid the thunders of world-shaking war,
I for a moment paused.

Or if I come not
Out of the mire and flame, I bid my soul,
Should it survive disaster, turn each autumn—
At the time when swallows southward fly—and sweep
Up and down these long vistas, and survey
With tranquil wonder all the lives beneath.

39

Can one ever forget, I wonder, that tumult and press
And dirt and weariness chilled by the bursts of rain;
The trenches winding along the broken hillsides;

The wire festooning the shell-holes; the muddy roads
Blocked with the endless stream of guns and men,
Camions, motors of generals, kitchens, wagons,
Guns again, and men again—all pouring
Slowly up the narrow roads, while slowly
Trickles back the stream of wounded and dying.
Rain, rain, soaking the yellow clay
Around dead horses; filthy orange pools
In old shell-craters; rattle of shots in the sky
As a plane with spitting machine-gun swoops to sweep
The crowded road with its fire. Always ahead
By day and night the tearing crash of the guns,
Endless, chilling, meaningless, like the rain.

40

The American howitzers crashed steadily, minute after
minute,
A mile behind me, under the crest of a slope,
And the whistle of flying steel cut the grey sky
High over me.

Ahead, the beautiful hill
Crowned with the spire of Montfaucon, rose clear
Circled continually with the faint white puffs
Of our own shells. Beside me, to right and left,
The small volcanoes of German shells sent up
Sudden black bursts of earth. From the woods to the left

The vicious rattle of German machine-guns broke
And ceased, and started and ceased, and started again.
Once more the rain commenced.

As I stood, tired
And cold and indifferent to everything, looking out
Across the mile of trenches and rusty wire
And craters of No-Man's-Land—and knew that there,
Beyond the curtain of woods, the German armies
Were moving ceaselessly, hour after hour, in the slow
Bitter toil of a steady fighting retreat—
I wondered if there on the hill of Montfaucon
Was standing some German poet dressed as a major,
Watching this cold calm scene of life and death,
And understanding it all no better than I.

41

What do they know of war
Who have read of it in histories?
I have seen war in the light of a flier's eyes,
And in the rust of a brain-spattered helmet,
And in the lines of a tired general's forehead.
It is a difficult thing; it is like life itself;
It is different from the histories.

I have felt it as a peril faced with indifference;
And as a long task to be endured to the end;
And as a fury that might shake the reason;
And as a pity, wide to enfold the world.

It is not written in the histories;
No trace of it is graven on the monuments.
It lives in the hearts of living men.
It dies when they die.

42

On a day of splendid windy sunshine
Under the slow occasional fire
Of the German guns on the other side of the plain,
I stood on the westward heights and saw below
The wide valley where Rheims gleamed in the sun—

The small outlines of a city
And a faery-like and far cathedral!

Rheims is a fabulous city.
Lost in the depths of the sea for a thousand years,
And raised to sight again as a wave-gnawed ruin
By some convulsion of sea-floor. Its roofs are fallen;
All its walls are fallen; no footfall stirs
Ever these streets; only the far-off boom
Or the nearer rending crash of the German shells,
Echoing back and forth across the valley.

43

Here where the only vision that we know
Is each his intricate task, and all the strength
Of mind and soul is on one narrow path

Intent, and we grow blind—here there is nothing
Of the wide scattered exaltation that sweeps
Through hearts in our own land.

Light darkens round us:—
As, round the peasant toiling in his fields,
The evening comes, and night is black and deep
Before he grows aware. Would that some star
Steady and clear might rise out of the east
To guide us. For the night, it shall be long.

44

We are the links of a long chain; we are
The slaves of an inherited servitude.
Here in futility our lives grow waste,
Spent in a task that has no meaning—a chaos
That breeds another chaos to follow it.

No man knows what he does, and if he knew
He would abjure the task. It is a region
Of terrible effort, agony, waste lives,
That move toward nothing.

Nothing shall emerge
Fairer and finer than before. This is
Wholly the devil's work, wholly a pause
In the soul's painful progress. Let them lie
Howso they will in all the capitols,
This is the swift reversion, this is the darkness.

A motor stopped at the door
 Of the shack of the Division Intelligence Officer;
 And there entered
 Major-General Hooper
 Commanding the Seventh Army.

We all rose and stood at attention.

He was a little heavy about the jowls
 And a little too much of the brisk West-Pointer.
 But he smiled kindly though strictly upon us all.

"Let me see your last reports. . . .
 Ah, so Prunter attacked yesterday, on my left. . . .
 Hum
 Very annoying . . . Hum . . . Hum

"Hum . . . Did Prunter lose many men?
 Twenty-eight hundred? . . . Hum . . . Too bad. . . .

"Is it true that the Armistice is probably going to be
 signed? . . .

"Hum . . . Not much time. . . .
 Telephone General Prunter
 That I shall attack at five to-morrow morning.
 And that I want heavy artillery support on my left.

And tell him to try, just for once,
To keep his guns off my infantry."

46

Friends, dearer than we tell!—let the dark hours
Reveal our light but the more clearly.

There is a light, certain as there is darkness;
Your eyes to-night were witnesses and pledge.

Foolish was the talk, around the mess-room table;
But well we knew that sacraments were there.

Good-night! We scatter out to the rain and darkness,
And go to bed without tears or embraces.

But I, lonely, feel strength beyond this darkness.
Friendship is more than all their futile wars.

We will go back and look on the real world.
All this has been a dream, too dark for telling.

LYRICS FOR THE YOUNG



YOUTH AND AGE

NO man of elder years than fifty
Should be empowered with lands and gold.
It turns them shrewd and over-thrifty,
It makes them cruel and blind and cold.

Only the young can without evil
Handle this snake and get no sting,
And toss their riches to the devil,
And think about some wiser thing.

Old men in impotence can beget
New wars to kill the lusty young.
Young men can sing: old men forget
That any song was ever sung.

THE LARK

Variation on a Theme by George Sterling

SPRING fields will soon be growing
To fruitful green again.
World-over, men are sowing
The seed in the ploughed plain.

Where rich the soil lies waiting,
Men plant the harvest there;
But the free lark sows music
On the unfruitful air.

GIRL BATHING IN A BROOK

AROUND you showers the silver light
Of mountain-aspens slim and white.
Whiter than their stems you stand
Tossing spray-drops from your hand.
Fresh out of the mountain-stream
The long lines of your body gleam
In crystal, and your laughter stirs
Woodland echoes.

Will worshipers
Magically out of the wood
Answer to your gay natural mood,
And emerge, and round you dance
With some gay song, some wanton prance—
Elves, leopards, pixies, dryads,
Fuzzy bears and smooth naiads,
Tall great queens, satyrs and gnomes,
Folk now driven from their homes
To some hollow hill whereunder
They live in dreams and love and wonder—
And dance around you in a ring
Under the rainbow-arch of Spring?

REFLECTIONS OF AN ANGEL IN HEAVEN

IF I were still a mortal, I
Would look much at that blue sky
Which now arches man and woman
While they still are sad and human.

And while still in mortal mesh
I would love sweet mortal flesh;
I would watch and touch and bless
Living beauty's wantonness.

Never any Spring should pass
In the swift dim mortal glass
But white-limbed girls and apple-trees
Should create my memories.

SMILING GIRL

A MUSIC seems to fold you;
Always your coming brings
Light—as if gods had told you
Report of happy things.

Within your arms no shadow
Of ill can ever stray,
But dreams of a green meadow
And a sunlighted day.

And he who is your lover
Laughs clear in his delight;
For him, though darkness cover,
The world is blinding-bright.

A sage he grows in learning;
He sees that life is good;
All wisdom flashes burning
Along his rapturous blood.

Lightly he spurns the folly
Which all the saints profess.
He knows, not pain is holy,
But only happiness.

NAKED GIRL BESIDE BLOSSOMING
CHERRY TREE

IT IS a gentle wind that stirs
The boughs above her in this blossoming cherry.
Not till the obscure ending of the day
Will this light vanish away from her.

The wise heart looks at this translucence
And marvels in silence,
Knowing nothing, fearing nothing
Except that the apparition vanish.

The Lord of Hosts is gone beyond our laughter;
The Tables and the Law moulder in darkness;
But the heart turns immaculate toward the sunlight,
And the white cherry every Springtime blossoms.

TO A LADY SINGING AN OLD SONG

AND now I know that every instrument
Will answer to your touch. Forgotten things
Revive when they are yours. What once they meant
Grows young when your slim fingers touch the strings.
This ancient music, of outmoded fashion,
Having no epoch, comes to life again—
And its old tenderness throbs into passion,
An evening sunlight seen through mists of pain.
The strings tremble . . . as I, in the midnight,
If you should whisper but the slightest word,
Would wake, and see the east break into light,
And hear the morning-song of every bird
That ever felt the dawn when earth was young.—
All birds would sing all songs that birds have sung.

OLD-FASHIONED ADVICE TO LOVERS

LOVE, an April-blossoming tree,
Is sweet to touch, is fair to see.
Let not the ambiguous dusks of night
Fold it round from lovers' sight.
But rather, where the sunlight throws
Its gleam on limbs of gold and rose—
Where not one shadow's veil can cover
The loved-one's beauty from the lover—
There whirl the last dim garment off
For the bright nakedness of love.

Let sunlight and cool airs conspire
In that white morning of desire;
Let the glad lover's heart be loud
To praise the secrets, shy and proud,
Of her whose beauty precious is
Only that she can make it his,
And for his dizzy vision be
All blossoms of a sacred tree
That casts its last dim shadows off
In the clear April-light of love.

TO A CHARMING LADY ABSENT
FROM HOME

TIME goeth with leaden feet,
Here where his steps were fleet
To follow down the days
Your swift and lovely ways.
Insooth, I like him not,
The drunken dragging sot.
He hath abjured all pace,
Now that he knows your face
Otherwhere, and no more
Finds aught to hurry for.
Thus Time, foul caitiff oaf,
Now sits him down to loaf,
And grins at my disaster
Who urge him to move faster.
He grunts: "I will not stir
Till you fetch back your Her.
Till She is here once more
I'll sprawl across your door."

A PRAYER

LORD—great Leviathan—
Whale of the infinite
Ocean—have mercy on
My minnow and me.

Thy noble maw, Lord,
Gapes always ravenous
For the small fishes—
My minnow and me.

Churning the universe
With thy great foam-flakes,
Why shouldst thou harry
My minnow and me?

Swim on in glory, Lord.
But when thou turnest,
Thou yet shalt choke on
My minnow and me.

LYRICS FOR THE OLD



WINTER DAY

GREY misty world of snow
Where fluttering to and fro
The clear frost-petals fly
Under a leaden sky—
Into your mists I seem to pass
Through the protecting glass,
And seem myself a snowflake, hurled
By wild winds up and down the world—
Asking of this short hour
Nothing except to feel that power
Which sustains snowflakes till in the end they must
Fall down to dust
Having swept half the heavens: I ask no more:
Others have asked a greater gift before,
And yet, for all their pleading, rest not now
Gem-like on any winter-sacred bough.

MOUNTAIN AGAINST MOUNTAIN

CLEAR golden lights
Now touch the western crests
Where mountain rises against mountain.
In the valleys now
At the sad hour of early evening
There is darkness.
The horses stand listless beside the fences.
The cows lie dejected and half-asleep.
The tired women droop beside their stoves.
The tired men drowse beside their plates.
There is no hope left, at this hour,
And no beauty and no wisdom, in the valleys.
Only Venus, to-night the evening star,
Glimmers miraculous above the sunset,
Above dark crests of mountain against mountain.

SUNSET

HERE on hills above the sunset
The plain seems green and beautiful, from afar.
The trees stand in rich masses.
The river is silver and beautiful in the evening light.
No one would believe, standing here,
That the plain is half desert,
And that the river is only polished rock
Shining in an alien glow.

CABEZON PEAK

AT CABEZON there rises a mountain
Perpendicular, heroic, out of the flat earth.
And it might be that the will of God
Had raised this vast column of granite upright
As a witness to his powers.

The Indians believed that, once.
And the Spanish peasants of to-day
Looking out from their doorways
Believe it still.
But in the blazing light of noon
Or in the purple half-lights of dusk
Many gay or sad men
Pass through Cabezón
Who do not believe that.

TWO SCORE YEARS AND TEN

NOT with a futile wrath but with composure
The wiser mortals learn their certain fate.
Youth ends in a cold twilight of disclosure;
And for youth's follies it is then too late.
No anger, no regretfulness, no tears
Can wrest what-might-have-been from what-may-be.
Silence is secret watchword for those years
That loom like mountains grim in mystery.
With calm we then approach the manifest grave;
With mimic smiles we greet the children's faces;
We counsel young men to be wise and brave;
We hide within our hearts the proved disgraces
That changed us from glad willow-wands of divining
To stiff twigs, deathward-bent; and no repining.

TO A GRANDMOTHER

IN THAT far past which we shall not recover,
What part of your once-intricate life seemed true?
Was that dull bullying ancient once your lover?
Did ever love come whispering close to you?
Do these tall sons, these hippy daughters, mark
Moments of splendid beauty in your life—
Or are they reliques of deeds done in the dark
When you were nothing but your husband's wife?
And the unpleasant grand-brats who now scream
"Grandmother! . . ." and destroy each word you say—
Did you desire them? Was that thing your dream?
Or did you merely follow Nature's way?
What do you think of those days, past recall?
Or is it that you never thought at all?

TO A CHINESE LORD

YOU were right, my Lord,
That night when you gravely told me
That you were held in no esteem—
Neither by the Northern war-lords
Nor by the Southern war-lords.
They are wise,
Knowing you to be powerless against them
And useless for them.
Not out of honourable clay like yours
Is moulded the effigy of the Great Statesman.
Nor, to the end of time, can any honourable man
Become a Leader of the People.

MASSACHUSETTS THANKSGIVING 1927

NOT on a day like this shall we renew
Our faith in anything that blooms, or sings,
Or smiles, or with good-will looks toward the sun.
Men have too clearly proved our hope untrue.
We can remember unforgiveable things.
We can remember what our kind has done.

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

WHEN stones shall yield delicious wine,
And Spring track swift on Summer's end,
You will accept these words of mine
And believe what I knew, my friend.

And when the oak tree can withdraw
From air, and be a seed again,
I shall forget the things I saw
And from my well-proved thoughts refrain.

Till then, there is no more to say.
You will not see what I can see.
May your God bless you on your way!
Go! leave my bitterer world to me.

TO ONE WHO WISHES TO FOUND
A NEW RELIGION

IS THERE on all this earth no courage
To match with our distress?
Must we again create small gods
To deck the nakedness
Of empty heaven? Will no man dare,
Facing that silent sky,
Say to his soul: "The Unknown Powers
Forever are unknown; but I, though blind, am I!"

Too well we know the bitter story
Of the great faiths of old—
How parable hardens into law—
How brass corrodes the gold.
Is there no courage in this race?
Shall man forever prance
Witless before his idols, and forgo
The supreme dignity of admitted ignorance?

“JOY”

To my friend Robinson Jeffers

JOY is not heroic or noble; you are right.
But it exists—in rare flashes recurrent like certain moments
of each Spring.
And its brief flame has no lesser worth
Than that of the mountains or of the silence surrounding
the mountains.

Can you or I divide this world into parcels of good and
of evil,
Or separate the terror of the fluctuating waves from the
terror of the unyielding rocks?
Or say—Stand here apart, Joy, thou dizzy wonder!
Or say—Stand there apart, Darkness, thou dizzy wonder!

No. . . .
Darkness and silence will lend to you and to me, soon
enough, their greatness.
But in the interval have the hills no flowers, the lovers no
immortal laughter?

From my own window, at this moment,
I see the joyous sun shining down in golden mists
Around even your private tower of grey stone, yonder
Beside the dark blue sea.

CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA: NIGHT

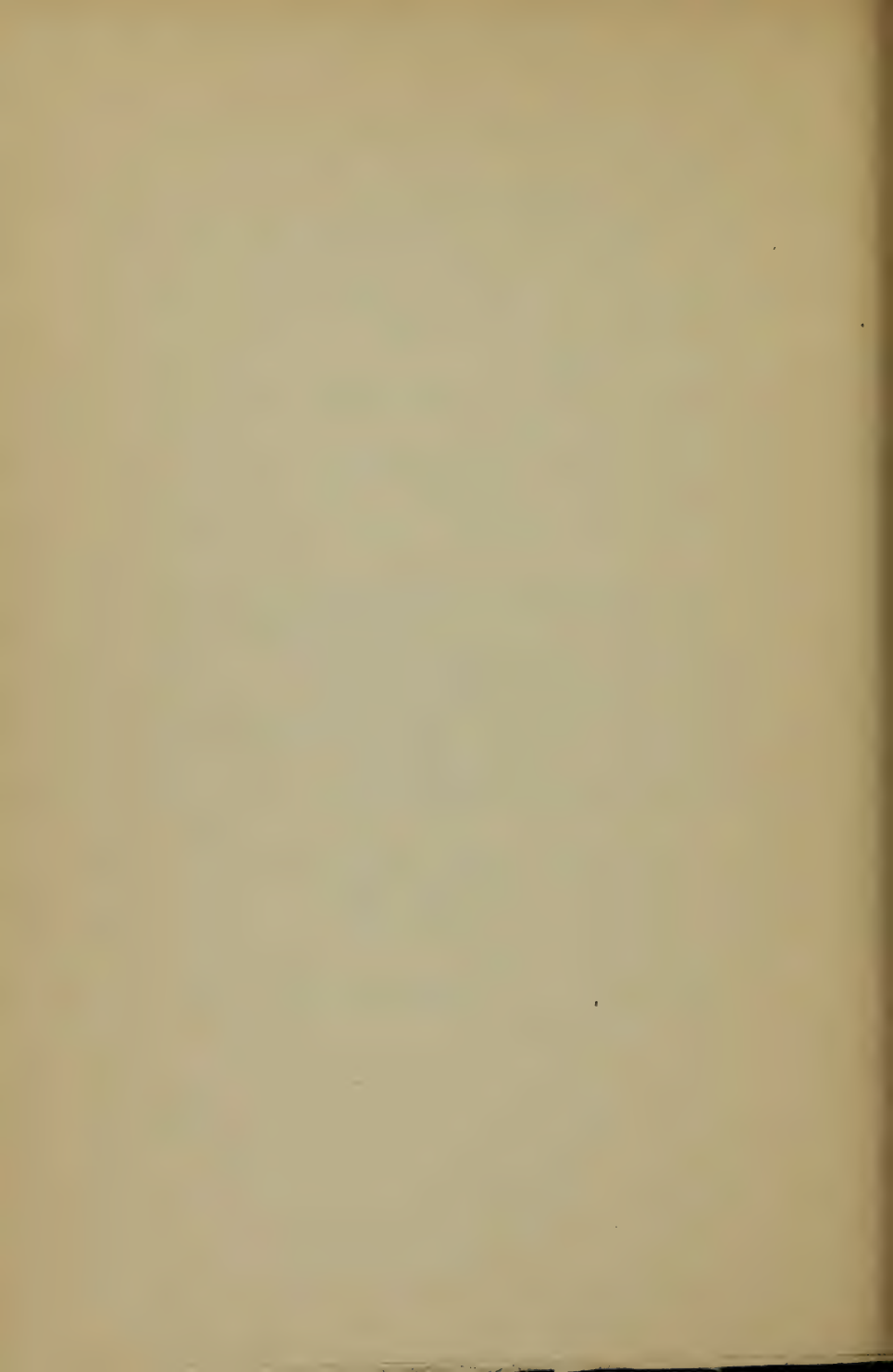
I HEAR the long waves come rolling in
Tumbling the confused sand-grains of the long beach.
I see the stars circling grandly by
In their predestined orbits.
Behind me the rivers flow down through their channelled
beds;
The meadows lie recurrently subject to the tyranny of the
seasons;
And beyond the rivers and the meadows rise the eternal
granite mountains:
And I remain quite unmoved by it all.
For these grandeurs are alien to me;
I do not know them; they are not of my people;
I am human, purely human; my stars, my meadows, my
oceans, my mountains
Lie secret in the hearts of the men and women I love.
I will not spend one moment of my brief hour
In confronting the far secrets of eternity.
I hear too clearly the long waves rolling in
Ominously over the sand-grains of the beach.

DEATH

YOU who worship the sun
And beautiful bodies and eager eyes—
You to whom work of days is sweet,
And the love of men and women—
For you, too, in quiet certainty
Death is waiting.
And on that day all that you loved
Shall be taken from you.
And in the place where you stood
Shall be only an emptiness
Soon forgotten by men.

Death does not come like an army with banners
Nor like a Dark King riding on a Dark Horse.
It comes as an obscure miasma,
Clouding the spirit, dizzying the air,
Weakening the will, playing pranks with the sun—
So that a man dies a puling child,
Ignominiously, as he was born.

Therefore, let us yield to death no reverence,
Nor view with any solemnity this fate.
Let us give reverence to life, only—
With such clear passion
That death be of no account in our midst
And no man honour it.



THE RETURN OF CHRIST



THE RETURN OF CHRIST

*I lay myself at your feet,
I, the twice-crucified.
And I beseech you, my beloveds,
Not to accept me.*

*For I have already endured
Too many martyrdoms.
Let not another sorrow be laid
On the heart of the man of sorrows.*

I

TAI SHAN, the Most Sacred Mountain,
Rises grey
In mass after mass of forbidding stone.
Under the fierce sunlight of summer
And in the blackness of winter nights
Its splintered bastions of granite
Loom enormous
Over the hills and valleys and plains
Of Holy China.

Fields lie at its feet—
The wide parched fields of Shantung, wherefrom
With toil and patience, like that of their fathers before them,
Men and women wring food for their mouths
And for the mouths of their children.

The Mountain looms
Over a land of recurrent life
And of recurrent death.

II

Past cascades and waterfalls,
Mounting up through rocky gorges,
Climbs the path where countless pilgrims' feet
Have sought the height, the wide-spreading outlook,
The forever-venerable spot, the heart of China.

In isolation rises the Most Sacred Mountain
Alone with the winds and the presences of the things that
are not.
And here men come, to put off mortality
And accept the stern majesty of the hills.

For this is the ancient holy-land
Where Confucius and Mencius and the Sages
Were born and walked among the fields and taught,
And here they died, and here they lie buried.
This is the land of the soul's homesickness:
This is the heart of Holy China.

III

Tai Shan, the Most Sacred Mountain,
Raises its barren crags
Above the central plains.
Far southward lie the regions of the tropical bamboo-forests
And the rivers where the palm
Lifts its slender feather-topped stem.
Far northward lie the iron-bleak hills of Manchuria

Where an icy wind blows across barren slopes.
To the west, a hundred days' journey distant,
Lie Tartary, and Thibet, and the wastes of Mongolia.
Eastward lies the sea.

It is an old land.
A hundred million graves rise sacred among the fields.
A hundred million living men reap their bread between the
 graves.
Day and night, and winter and summer, pass over the land.
It is an old land, a land of sorrows.

If a pilgrim, leaving Tai Shan, the Most Sacred Mountain,
Journeys northward for two days or three
He comes to the low banks of the Yellow River
Rushing in flood toward the ocean.
There on the shore of the enormous stream
There lies open to him the story of a people
Who have forever battled against the forces of the river.
Year after year, in the spring floods,
The waters have suddenly arisen
And swept with waste and ruin over dykes, fields, farms,
Houses, villages, and populous cities,
Leaving behind them terror
And famine and death.

Or if the pilgrim
Goes two days to the westward
He comes to a yet sterner desolation—

To the plains where each summer
The fear of drought hangs in the sky and breathes from the
earth—
And no man knows whether he and his children shall have
bread
And whether they shall live to see the springing of the next
year's harvest.

Tai Shan, the Most Sacred Mountain,
Looks down upon the land from afar.

IV

On a late afternoon of the spring season
In the Year of the Great Miracle,
Had a belated pilgrim, tarrying on the heights
Of Tai Shan, looked toward the eastward,
He would have descried tumults of wind and cloud and
darkness
Mounting out of the distance
Where lies the Yellow Sea.
Swirls of vapour shot upward.
White mists struck at black mists in conflicts of mid-air.
And like the fiery convulsions of volcano-gases
The up-streaming eddies met and parted
And remet and remingled
In confusions of contesting power
Up from the Yellow Sea
In endless ranks

Poured the chaotic armies of the storm—
Their black or white banners already torn
By the shock of onset.
And slowly the invading hordes swept the sky,
Shadowing with unnatural night the whole wide Province
of Shantung;
And they approached
And hid from the sight of the plains and of all men
The summit of the Most Sacred Mountain.

All night
The sky was terrible with lightnings.
Thunders rolled like the voices of angry monsters
Over the plains of Shantung.
The grey summit of the Mountain
Was lost in a world of whirling clouds
Tossed by winds that had come hither from the ends of the
earth.
The Mountain shook; and all night
The houses of the peasants on the plain
Were filled with fear and the weeping of children
And the wonder and prayers of old men.

Dawn came. The thunders ceased. The clouds lifted.
The vapours vanished as swiftly as they had come—
Leaving a sky blue, cool, and translucent,
And a radiant sun rising over Tai Shan.

And in the clear calm dawn-light of the spring morning
A Stranger came walking down the long road of the Most
Holy Mountain.

V

Where the plain begins—harsh, unfruitful—
And the mud-walled houses of the peasants
Cluster, six or eight together, in small villages—
There the Stranger paused
And stood a long while in silence
Looking back at the bright summit of Tai Shan.

Then he turned
And surveyed the houses
Of this village wherein he stood.
And he approached a house
And through the open door he said—
“Will you give me a cup of water?”

An aged man came and stood in the doorway
And looked at the Stranger.
He answered, “Yes,” and for a moment he was gone.
Presently he returned with two small cups and a large steam-
ing tea-jar
From which he poured into the cups, for the Stranger and
for himself.
And seating himself on the bare ground beside the doorway
He motioned the Stranger to a seat beside him.

And the two sat in the clear dawn,
And drank tea, and smiled quietly at each other.

The old man said at last—"You are a stranger?"
The Stranger nodded.
"You have come far?" the old man said.
"Yes, very far," the Stranger said.
"You are tired: then rest!" said the old man.
And they drank tea, and smiled quietly at each other.

After a little while the old man
Looked curiously at the Stranger.
Gently he asked—"Are you a Holy-Man?"
The Stranger answered: "I do not know."
Whereupon the old man again smiled, and drank tea.

At length the old man raised his arm
And pointed to the rocky summit
Of Tai Shan, the Most Sacred Mountain.
"There," he said,
"Once stood the feet of Confucius: did you know that?
There Confucius, looking down on the world below,
Felt in his heart the dawning of that wisdom
Which has made for us our Holy China."
The Stranger answered—"Yes, there once stood
The Ancient, the Most Holy Teacher.
The Mountain remembers his words.
The Mountain shall forever echo with his words."

A silence came upon him.
The eyes of the old man sought the eyes of the Stranger in
vain.
Presently the Stranger arose,
And embracing the old man with a grave tenderness,
He walked onward.

VI

From Tai Shan, southward
Leads a highway toward the China Sea.
Beyond the China Sea flame the flowers of Siam and Burmah
And a tropic sun.

From Tai Shan, northward
A highway leads toward the Yellow River
And the vast twelve-gated city of Peking
And the wastes beyond.

The Stranger turned his steps northward.
Day by day, in the houses of the villagers,
He ate the food of the poor,
And spoke little except his thanks,
And slept at night in the open fields.

In many a village
Men talked for years thereafter
Of a stranger who had come silent
And had gone silent.

Few remembered of him more than a deep look, in the moment of parting,
Or his hand laid in parting on the head of a child.

He walked slowly along the highroad.
His steps moved undeviatingly northward.

VII

On the highroad, passing slowly northward,
In the noontide of a spring day,
The Stranger stopped—for a sudden voice
Was shrilling in his ears.
And lifting his gaze from the dust of the highroad
He saw, crouching by the roadside,
A begging leper.

The leper cried out—"O Holy-Man, O Holy-Man!
Have a little pity on this most miserable of creatures!
Look at my hands!
Look at my feet!
Look at my scalp—look, look:
Who more miserable on earth than I, O Holy-Man?
What man of all mankind more worthy of your pity?"

The Stranger approached the leper, and said—
"Man, I pity you from my heart."

The leper's eyes gleamed with a voluptuous joy.
"O Holy-Man!" he cried,
"Out of your holiness, out of your goodness,
Sit down a while and let us talk of leprosy.
And then you will give me a little charm,
A little amulet, or a lock of your hair,
Or at least you will spit on me your sacred spittle."

The Stranger said—"The body of this death is upon you,
poor man,
And there is no healing of this corruptible flesh for you.
But let the days that remain to you be lighted by the light
of your own spirit:
Turn homeward to the fastnesses of your own heart.
There shall you find a different healing.
There shall you find a healing."

The leper shrieked—"O Holy-Man, give to me something, anything!
Let me touch your hand!
Let me touch your robe!
Let me lie within your shadow!
For the love of mercy!"

The Stranger said—"Not even for the love of mercy
Shall you lie within my shadow."

And the Stranger moved swiftly away
Through the noonday sunlight,
And with stern eyes
Walked onward.

And as he went, there followed after him the cry—
“O Holy-Man, a miracle! Perform a miracle! I am a leper!”

VIII

One evening, as the feet of the Stranger
Drew near to the plain
That borders the Yellow River,
There came upon him suddenly a bandit
Carrying a great club and a sword.
And the bandit, standing with legs wide-spread across the
path,
Smiled evilly, and said nothing.

The Stranger approached the bandit, and said—
“Why do you bar my path?”

The bandit smiled a wise smile:
And suddenly whirling his club
Struck the ground so deep a blow
That the club stood upright in the earth.

The Stranger said—
“What would you have of me?”

“Everything you have!” said the bandit
As his smile widened and his eyes stared menacingly.

The Stranger turned, and looked for a moment
To where, in the west,
The evening light was dying.
Then he confronted the bandit with compassionate eyes
And said—"I would that you could take all that you ask
for."

The bandit suddenly threw away his sword
And knelt in the dust of the highway,
And cried out—"O Holy-Man, Holy-Man,
Give me your blessing! give me your peace!"
The Stranger answered—"My blessing I give you freely;
But whatsoever peace is mine, I cannot give you:
For no man's peace can be another man's peace."

IX

As the Stranger crossed the wide plain
That approaches the Yellow River
A small child emerged from the roadside bushes
And looked carefully at the face of the man.
And the child said trustfully—"Please, give me a copper.
For I am hungry, and my mother is dead."
The Stranger laid his hand on the head of the child
And said—"I am sorry; I have no money;
I have nothing; I have nothing I can give you."

The child whined, and disappeared into the bushes.

The Stranger walked on down the road, weeping bitterly.

X

The Stranger came to the Yellow River, then in flood.
And he paused on the bank and watched the ruin
Of a hundred villages streaming by him in the tawny current.
A ferryman approached him, and said—"Would you cross
to the farther bank?"
The Stranger answered—"Yes."

As they crossed the wide water,
Slowly, battling against the power of the stream,
The Stranger said to the boatman—"Many are dead?"
The boatman shrugged his shoulders
And answered—"It is always so when the Scourge of China
Goes mad in the spring of the year, and comes down
Like a dragon over our fields, our houses, our cities.
Yes, it is always so in the spring of the year.
It is the will of the gods."

They were then in the middle of the broad tawny water.
The boatman said—"You look to me like a strong man—
Come with me and help me.
For up the river a little way
There are houses, islanded by the flood,
Where perhaps lives could still be saved."

The Stranger said gravely—"I may not stop,
For it is not upon my own business that I go northward.
I must go on
No matter what lie in my path."

He looked ahead
Across the narrowing swirls
Of the rushing water.
When the prow of the boat touched the low shore
He stepped from the boat
And walked steadily onward, speaking no word.

XI

The vast twelve-gated city of Peking
Lifts its prodigious walls
In the midst of a sandy plain.
Within its gates the lives of a million beings
Mingle and meet and part.
Three thousand years have passed since its first stone
Was laid; the palace of Kubla Khan once stood
Within its walls; within its walls still stand
Temples and palaces, altars and effigies,
Hovels of beggars and cloisters of great sages.

The Stranger entered through the Southern Gate,
Threading his way among the jostling crowds,
And moved, as one to whom his path is known,
Through labyrinths of streets and hordes of men—
Until he came to where, by the North Wall,
The ancient Temple of Confucius stands.

It was the day of the Festival of the Third Month,
And the broad courtyard of the temple was filled

With the rich and the poor, the high and the low,
Celebrating the rites
Of Confucius, the Ancient, the Most Holy Teacher.

The Stranger crossed the noisy courtyard
And came to where, in the porches of the temple,
Clustered the priests, who, their sacred duties over,
Gathered in little groups with quiet talk
Or stood in silence looking down on the people.
The Stranger approached a calm elderly priest
And asked—"Are you the Abbot of this temple?"
The priest replied—"I am but the Keeper of the Sacred
Archives.
The Reverend Abbot—that is he."

The Stranger approached the Abbot and addressed him.
"I have come," he said,
"A long way—from beyond Tai Shan the Most Sacred
Mountain.
I have come to speak grave words
Unto the priests and the people.
And it is in the courtyard of this temple
That the words are to be spoken."

The Abbot looked at the Stranger with eyes of astonishment.
His lips opened as though to speak.
But he remained silent, and his brow darkened
With unuttered thoughts.

The Stranger, looking not at the Abbot but at the throng
in the courtyard,
Said in a low voice—
“Have I your leave
That I speak to the priests and the people?”

The Abbot, on whose face
Were indelibly graven the lines of an old wisdom,
Looked again into the eyes of the Stranger,
And hesitated in a moment of indecision.
Then he said—“You have my leave.
For I see that you are no common wanderer,
But a good and wise man—perhaps a sage
And brother to the Sages of the Bamboo Grove, and to the
Hermit of the Gorges.
Perhaps you have come to us
Out of your solitude and meditation
To teach us anew the learning of the Ancients
And refresh as from a cool spring the purity of our faith.

“Yet the mouth that utters wisdom
Finds not always the ear of understanding.
Will you not rather say what must be said
To me and my priests alone?—
That the multitude be not confused
With the lightning of a too great tempest,
And that the beneficent rain of gentle showers only
Shall touch their fields?”

The Stranger answered—"It is to the priests and to the people that I must speak."

The Abbot said—"I have suffered many things to-day
In a dream because of you!
But it shall be as you will."

And he turned away, and with trembling lips
Bowed his head before the Altar of Confucius.
And the Stranger turned
And spoke to the priests and the people.—

XII

"I beseech you that you reject the body of this death,
And that you let not this sting come upon you before there
shall come death's inevitable sting,
And that you permit not this victory before there shall come
the grave's inevitable victory.

"I lay myself at your feet,
I, the twice-crucified.
And I beseech you, my beloveds,
Not to accept me.

"For I have already endured
Too many martyrdoms.
Let not another sorrow be laid
On the heart of the man of sorrows."

XIII

The Stranger paused, and hid his face in his hands.
And a tremulous sigh of bewilderment
Passed over the multitude.
Then the Stranger lifted up his head
Clear and calm in the afternoon sunlight
And spoke again to the people.—

XIV

“Who I am, I know not.
I am a Stranger.
I am sent hither in love,
And in terror, and in sorrow.

“I come to you from beyond Tai Shan, the Most Sacred
Mountain.
I speak to you with fear and pity,
But I speak what must be spoken.

“Dearly beloved friends, I beseech you
That you yield not—
That you close your ears to the words of those who would
betray you—
And that you reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

“For nothing save evil has been wrought on earth in
that name.
Oh take not to your bosoms so perilous a serpent as Christ!

"I say unto you—Yield not to the betrayers,
No, not though they come armed with a Name and a Gospel.
For there is no wisdom in all the prophets so great as the
wisdom that lies in the heart of each of you.
I, a Son of God, say this unto you, my equal brothers.

"In the long course of the seasons
It is my fate to come unto you
And prophesy unto you the fate of dogs that die in gutters
If you avow not the sovereignty of your own hearts.

"I beseech you to strengthen your hearts
And to yield not up the fortress,
Nor let the traitor who dwells within you open the gates,—
Nor listen to the voices that cry out to you
Proclaiming the Saviour Christ.

"In the lands of the West
Shrewd men have seized upon the name of Christ
And have made for themselves a church that is not Christ's
church
And a priesthood that he would scourge from the altar.
They have made for themselves a temporal power
Where he left to them a spiritual power.
They have contrived fetters for the weak
Where he left to men a sword against the mighty.
They have given false meanings to his words, and with them
stopped the mouths

Of men who were Sons of God—men who were Christ's
brothers.

They have blinded the eyes of Christ's brothers and cut out
their tongues

Lest the Word of God be spoken.

“What is the Word of God?

Is it a writing upon old parchment?

Is it inscribed upon tablets of brass?

Is it graven upon stone?

Is it a secret whispered to one another

By the great fishes in the depths of the sea? . . .

O ye of little faith!

“I say unto you that the Word of God

Has been uttered many times and in many tongues.

Wherever a free man speaks from a generous heart,

There the Word of God is spoken:

There the Great Wind blows through the branches of the
Tree

And the leaves rustle with utterance.

“But if you ask, Where is God? I say unto you: Seek not
to find him.

He hides too far;

He hides too close:

You shall not see him.

"There is God, and there is man; and they are one.
Also, there is God and there is man, and they shall never
be one, or know or even pity one the other.
This is a mystery which I deliver unto you.
Seek not to fathom it. Nor God nor man can fathom it.

"Are these words bitter to your hearts?
I would that I could make them sweet.
But it is better that man gnaw granite
Than that he dream of cool fruits that are not.

"Man, miserable man, who lives among terrors and pain,
And toils in the sweat of his brow and in the loneliness of
his spirit,
And dies into the general darkness of the grave—
What hope shall there be for him,
What assuagement,
What salvation?

"Dearly beloved friends, I deliver unto you the truth:
There is not for man any hope, nor any assuagement, nor
any salvation.
When the hour comes, he shall die into the general darkness
of the grave
And the places that knew him shall know him no more.

"Yet sometimes shall come incommunicable moments
When a man's own fate is as nothing to him.
And he grows aware that he is a Leaf of the Eternal Tree,
A Wave of the Infinite Ocean,
A swift Moment of the Life Everlasting.

“And that the heart of man may wander not in darkness,
I beseech you to have courage,
And to permit not again the old tragedy
And the old perfidy and the familiar betrayal.
Accept not what is offered you,
But abide in the faith of your fathers
Until that day dawns within you
When you shall rise up free men.

“And now I give unto you the Three Great Command-
ments
Which you shall live by and die by.
And if you fail in this, then can nothing aid you.

“Firstly, and this is the greatest Commandment,
I say unto you that each man shall be himself and no other
man.
For that a man live not the life of his own spirit,
That is the ultimate sin,
That is the sin against the Holy Ghost which is in him.
Let him not speak another’s words or think another’s
thoughts or live by another’s laws,
But be a stern law unto himself, and look inward for the
light that is law in his own heart.

“Secondly, I say unto you
That no man shall lay upon another
His hand or his will or his laws
To constrain that other.

“Thirdly, I speak the last Commandment—
That you worship nothing—
Neither the thunder that is over you nor the earth that is
under you
Nor the gods that are made in your or another’s image,
Nor even the Power that blows through all life
As the wind blows through the leaves of the tree.

“For it is not fitting that a man should worship or pray.
It is fitting that he should marvel, and live.”

XV

The Stranger spoke no more.
The priests and the multitude stood silent.
The Abbot rose with ashen face
From before the altar of Confucius
And stood silent.

Then as a slow wind bows the tops of a pine-forest
The people standing before the Stranger in the crowded
courtyard of the temple
Knelt, and a murmur swept through them—“Holy One!—
Great Teacher!—O Holy Words!—Save us!—O save us!”

The Stranger lifted his head
In a high gesture of anger.
“Reverence me not!” he cried.
“For I am that which you are!”

But a great wave of wailing again swept over the people—
“Holy One! Holy One! Vouchsafe us your blessing!
Your hand! Your robe! The touch of your shadow,
That we be saved! The touch of your shadow!”

There came into the eyes of the Stranger
The look of a stricken creature
That sees its doom closing in upon it.

XVI

The Abbot, with slow steps,
Crossed the wide terrace of stone
To where the Stranger stood.
And reverently taking the Stranger's hand in his own
He turned and spoke to the people.

“Your hearts are moved, my friends of many years,
By the great light suddenly vouchsafed us.
My heart, too, is moved and shaken and uplifted and il-
luminated.
And I say to you, Fall down! Bow your foreheads to the
earth!
For this is the New Sage, come down from the Most Holy
Mountain!
This is the Day of the Great Miracle!”

The Abbot lifted his hands for a moment toward heaven
And then knelt humbly before the Stranger.

All the multitude in the courtyard,
Crying aloud their despair and their hope,
Bowed their heads to the pavement,
And a tide of lamenting and rejoicing rose from their
dust-kissing lips.

And as the clamour abated
The Abbot raised his hand for silence, and spoke—
“Let no man have doubt of this new wonder.
For out of far regions there has come unto us
The Sage of Sages whom we have long awaited,
And this is the Day of the Great Miracle.
He has come unto us to be our Sacred Teacher
And to lead our Living Faith into rich valleys.
The World of the West has rejected and betrayed Him.
He has come home now to His chosen people.

“Blind and dumb emissaries have gone before Him.
Gross and ignorant creatures out of the Western World
Have preached a gospel that is not His gospel
And polluted Holy China with their breath.
But here at length is the Living Sage, the New Buddha:
And it is the Learned Lord Jesus Christ Himself before
whom we kneel to-day!”

The Abbot bowed his body
And touched his forehead to the hem of Christ's robe.

Christ turned passionately away
And addressed the people.—

XVII

"That which is said in my name
Is not the speech of my lips.
O listen to my own words,
That I may bid you reject me utterly.

"For if you accept me
You will again deliver over the heart of man unto its enemies;
And all that I loved shall be again trodden under foot,
And all that I loathed shall again ride in the chariot.

"Must the oppressors forever triumph in my name?
O you of pure and simple hearts who see my heart naked
before you, will you again
Reject my words, and believe the words of those whom I
rejected?

"Twice already has my soul been crucified.
Will you crucify my soul again?

"In my name, the daylight has been darkened,
And God, who is Light, has been made a looming shadow.
In my name, evil men have assumed the powers of darkness
And sent bats' wings across the face of the sun.

"And seeing all the ruin that has been wrought on earth
in my name,
I say that you shall never utter my name again!"

And he turned aside and covered his face with his robe.

XVIII

The Abbot again knelt
And touched his forehead to the hem of Christ's robe.
Then he rose and stood, tall and sombre and beneficent,
In the late afternoon sunlight.
And he spoke to the people—

"Humility is the virtue
Which our Lord Christ makes manifest unto us to-day.
Let no man forget this day:
Tell it unto the uttermost generation,
How Christ, as an example unto us,
Took upon Him our weakness and our sorrow,
And deigned to be Man as well as God."

Christ stood alone,
Hearing not the words that were spoken.

And the Abbot spoke again—
"This is the Appointed Day,
And the Spiritual Throne of all Asia awaits Him.
For Him has long been prepared the rich field of Holy China
And the hearts of the believers.

"My friends, we are a patient people.
We hold the secret of the long silences.

But when the hour has come, we know it as the awaited
hour.

And in that hour we become one with the dragon-winds
and the tiger-seas

And the words of the Sages and the solitudes of the
mountain.

“This is Christ, the Sage of Sages!

This is the Hour!

Holy China shall become Holy Asia!

To-morrow we shall go forth as an army with banners!

“And You, O Lord over all Asia,

We Your priests and protectors bow before You.

And with the love of chosen disciples

We entreat You to enter into Your Glory!”

The Abbot knelt;

And a wild clamour of adoration arose from the people.

Christ turned to the Abbot, and said—

“I am Christ, the Son of God—

But only as the leper by the well and the dog that eats offal
in the road

Are the Sons of God likewise.

Worship me not!”

The Abbot said—

“Lord, reject not Thy loving servants!”

[96]

Christ turned and said to the people: "I will give to you
a parable.

At the foot of Tai Shan, the Most Sacred Mountain,
In the parched fields of Shantung,
Dwells a peasant who tills his small plot of earth,
And eats his daily food, and rears his children,
And deals justly with his neighbours, and with tranquillity
greets each new dawn.

When the hour of death comes, he faces the darkness with
composure.

After his death, he is buried with honour, and his memory
is venerated by those who knew him,
And no man commits evil in his name.
Go worship him, not me."

The Abbot said—"Lord, we beseech Thee!
O Lord of Asia!"

Christ turned upon the Abbot, and said harshly—
"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

XIX

The face of the Abbot grew grey as weathered stone.
He lifted his hand for silence and spoke to the people.—

"You have my holy blessing,
If it be of any virtue or holiness, after this day—
This day on which the powers of evil have arisen

And wrought their will.
This day the gods have been absent
And the omens inauspicious.
To-day I have dreamed a terrible dream,
And behold! it has come true.
My friends of many years, demons have beset me.
But now my eyes see clear.
For now I perceive that this man is a liar and an impostor—
And I deliver him into your hands!”

And lifting his hands
He thrust Christ from the temple platform
And into the midst of the people.

And a great cry arose from the people—
“Impostor! Betrayer!
A cheat! A lying beggar! Kill him! Kill him!”
And a man smote him, and a child smote him,
And a woman spat at him.
And he staggered onward through the crowded courtyard
of the temple
Amid curses and blows and maledictions.
And every man’s hand was against him.
And they drove him onward
With cries and taunts and the casting of stones
And insults and filth, till he was blind and bleeding
And staggered against walls and against the foremost of
those who beset him.

Until at last one of them jostled him fiercely with his
shoulder
So that Christ fell headlong and lay stunned on the ground.
And the mob trampled upon him,
And then thinking him dead, scattered in fear and left him.

XX

After many hours, Christ's spirit awoke from its swoon.
He painfully dragged his bruised and broken body to the
city gate.
And there a homeward-bound peasant
Took pity on the half-dying man
And lifted him gently into his cart
And bore him to his own hut
And gave him food and water.

For many weeks thereafter
Christ lay stricken
And uttered no word.

At length on a day his wounds were healed.
And he arose, and looked into the eyes of the peasant
With a look of such gratitude and love and sorrow
That the man, to his dying hour,
Never spoke of that look save with awe.
And Christ went forth.

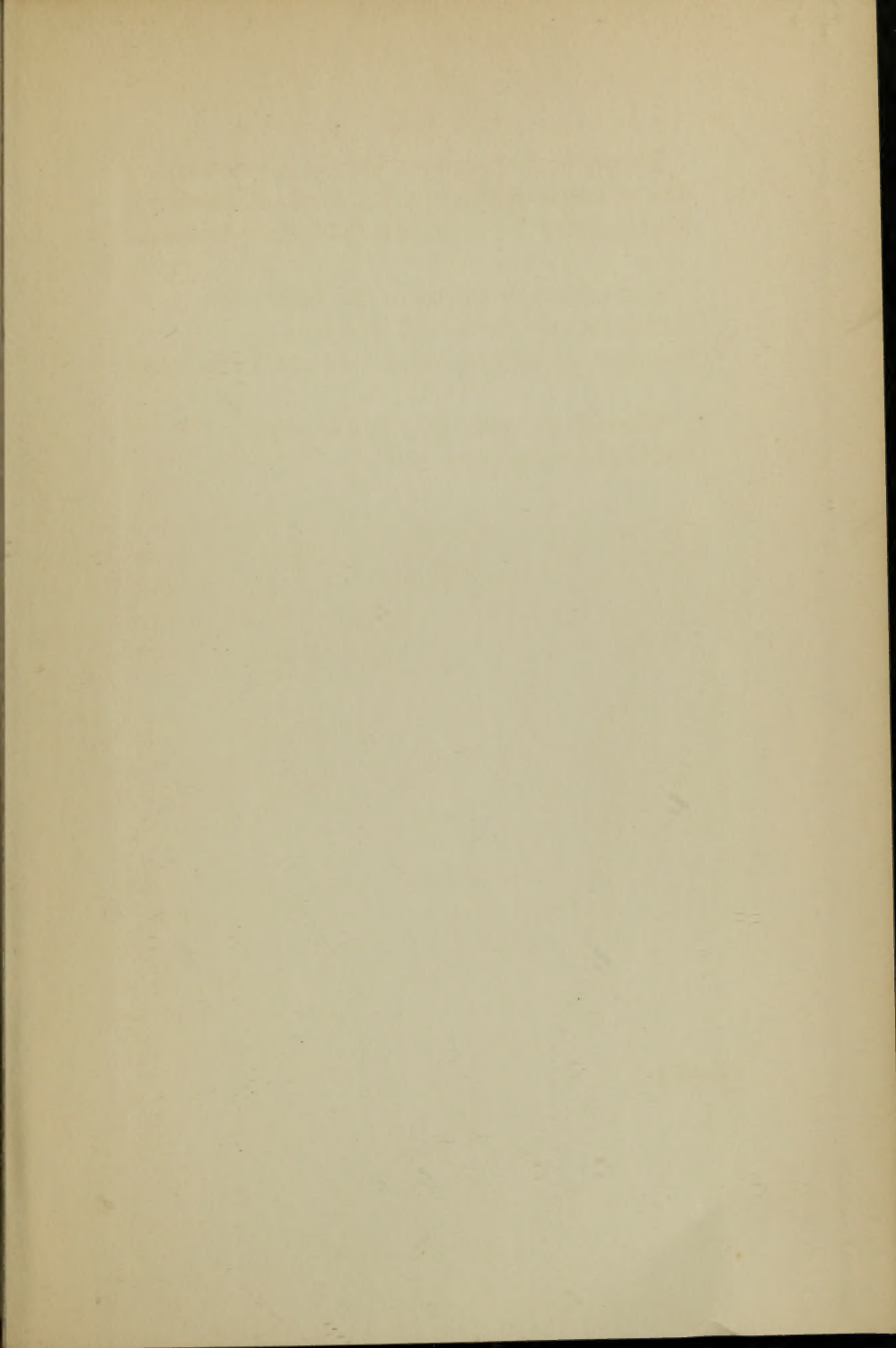
XXI

Thereafter he journeyed slowly southward,
And at length came to the province of Shantung,
And ascended Tai Shan, the Most Holy Mountain.

And a storm arose out of the Yellow Sea
And enveloped the Sacred Mountain
In a night of swirling clouds and terrible thunders.

When dawn came, the sun rose clear.
But Christ was seen no more.

THE END



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WITHDRAWN

